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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001174

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SUBJECT: NEA A/S WELCH DISCUSSION OF WESTERN SAHARA, UNION
FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN AT FRENCH MFA, JUNE 12, 2008

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reason
s 1.4. (b), (d).

11. (SBU) NEA A/S Welch held extensive bilateral consultations on key NEA issues with French MFA counterparts in Paris on June 12. This cable focuses on Western Sahara and the Union for the Mediterranean; other topics reported septel (notal). Participants included:

USG

--NEA A/S David Welch
--Deputy Legal Adviser Jonathan Schwartz
--Embassy Paris Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt
--Embassy Paris NEA Watcher (notetaker)
--NEA Staff Assistant Mustafa Popal

GOF

--French MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Jean Felix-Paganon
--French MFA NEA Adviser to the Foreign Minister, Christophe Bigot
--French MFA IO Adviser to the Foreign Minister Alice Guitton
--French MFA DAS-equivalent for North Africa Nathalie Loiseau
--French MFA IO desk officer for NEA Salina Grenet
--French MFA Morocco desk Officer Tudor Alexis (notetaker)

12. (C) After Welch observed that we had hoped for more support from France after we declared our preference in the UNSC for an autonomy-based solution to the Western Sahara dispute, French MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Felix-Paganon said it all boiled down to one thing: getting Algerian President Bouteflika to the July 13 Paris summit to kick off the Union for the Mediterranean. He acknowledged that, despite not having gone as far as we had in favoring the Moroccan plan as a basis for negotiations, France still risked losing on all counts, i.e., Bouteflika deciding not to attend the summit and the Moroccans angry at France. The lack of a public declaration notwithstanding, Felix-Paganon reaffirmed France's agreement on our "strategic vision" of how best to resolve the Western Sahara conflict.

13. (C) The private discussions with the Algerians on this subject has been relatively easy, according to Felix-Paganon, with both sides essentially agreeing to disagree and France emphasizing its increasing concerns about security in northwest Africa. The Algerians, however, are especially sensitive in terms of public expressions of French policy on

this and other matters. More broadly, Felix-Paganon cited the areas of constant and pessimistic French reflection regarding Algeria that Embassy Paris has repeatedly reported: the stalled reform process, the stagnant economy, the unlikelihood of significant -- or positive -- political change, and the related expectation that an ailing Bouteflika will seek a third term in office.

¶4. (C) Welch asked about North African views of the July 13 summit. DAS-equivalent for North Africa Nathalie Loiseau responded that Libyan leader Qadhafi may have gone too far in his speech to participants at the recent mini-summit he convened in Tripoli. The GOF has interpreted the absence of a concluding communique as signifying disagreement with the criticisms of the Union for the Mediterranean that Qadhafi spelled out. In addition, the failure of Morocco or Egypt to attend was a strong signal to Qadhafi that other Arab leaders did not wish to associate themselves with his views. Loiseau claimed that a French source "inside the conference room" reported that the other leaders told Qadhafi that the best way for Libya to contest and change the proposed union was through participation. FM Kouchner's NEA adviser Christophe Bigot interjected that Bouteflika would be hard pressed not to attend, since Morocco and Tunisia will do so, although he would likely wait until the last minute to decide. Syrian President Asad has already said he would likely attend as the price he needs to pay for reducing international isolation and regaining respectability.

¶5. (C) When asked how France assesses Qadhafi's view of the union, Bigot contended Qadhafi does not "need" the union, particularly after his visit to Paris in December, and Libya, in any event, is not a participant in the EU's Barcelona Process. Felix-Paganon agreed and said the question for

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Qadhafi regarding the July 13 summit was whether to boycott altogether or send a lower level representative. (Note: This assertion predated subsequent media and Elysee speculation that Qadhafi might actually attend the summit in part to voice his concerns about the Union in person. End note) He added that firm opposition from Qadhafi could complicate participation for the other Arabs, who will already be digesting the upgrade in the EU's relationship with Israel. Felix-Paganon noted, in this context, that Israeli PM Olmert had already accepted his invitation to attend the Paris summit.

¶6. (C) Welch, at Felix-Paganon's request, provided a short update on the status of U.S./Libyan relations, focused on discussions to achieve a comprehensive, government-to-government settlement of outstanding terrorist claims by U.S. victims and their families.

¶7. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this cable.

¶8. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

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